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A SCOUT ACROSS INDIA

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WILLIAM TURNER, M.A.

K. PALANIANDI PILLAI & CO.,

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BY

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PREFACE.

The following story is for Indian boys, and is designed to appeal to the clean sense of romance and adventure in every boy's heart. The places are in many cases imaginary, and the story has no moral except that which is obvious. It will serve its purpose if it helps to bring some ambitions, some ideals, and pleasure into youthful minds.

THE AUTHOR.

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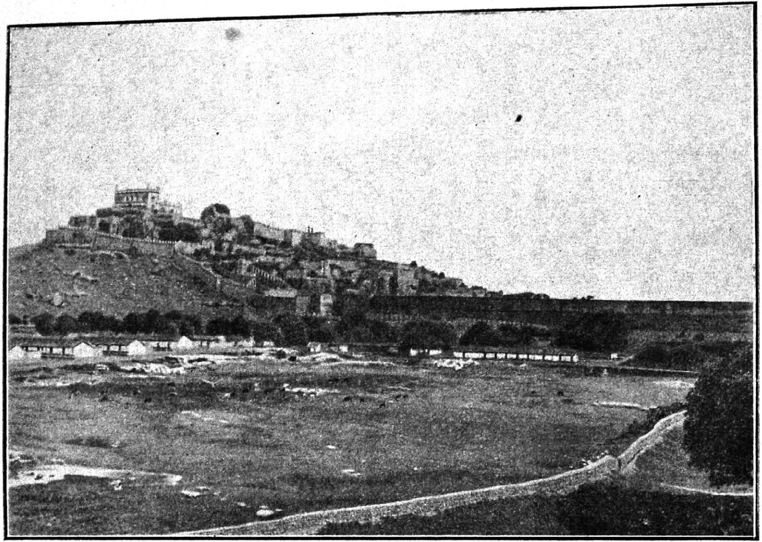


THE GOLCONDA FORT

CHAPTER I

RAM'S PROBLEM

Ramadass sat under a palm tree, a thoughtful look on his face. He had much to think about, for a great loss had come into his life. Only two months before, his beloved father had died, and Ram's mother and he had been left alone in the world. The world did not seem such a fine place without a father, though it had been all right before.

An uncle had given the widow and her son a shelter in his house. But Ramadass felt that it was not nearly so pleasant as the home they had left. For one thing, he had left the quiet town by the sea, and had come to the city. Now, instead of the sands and the waves, he looked on dirty streets. Noisy tram cars ran near his house, and only in the public gardens some distance away was grass to be found. Ramadass had been in the third form at school, and had been a keen scout. Now he had not been sent to school by his new guardian, but was given work of all kinds to do. Ramadass did not

grumble, because he was a scout. But he had a sad, lost feeling inside him.

'Don't sit there dreaming and wasting time!' shouted a shrill voice. A woman came out of the house, and looked angrily at the thoughtful lad. 'We have no time for idle fellows here!' she said. 'Go and draw water from the well, and then I want you to bring some flour from the bazaar.'

Ramadass obeyed in silence. His two cousins, he knew, were in school, and were never asked to do household work. But he and his mother seemed always to have some task or other. He brought the water in silence, and then walked down to the bazaar where the grain shops were. All the time there were many thoughts in his mind, and he wished he were a man, so that he could take his mother away to a fine home.

That evening, his mother noticed how silent the boy was. She watched him for a while with a heavy heart, and longed to help him.

'What are you thinking of, Ram?' she said.

'Mother, what will I do when I grow up?'

This was a question which the poor woman had been putting to herself. She knew that a boy

who grew up without finishing his education would never go very far in life. She looked at him in silence, and a tear fell down her cheek.

'Mother, why don't you let me go to school now ? You know that I don't like staying at home and doing kitchen work.'

'We have not our home now, Ram. But be patient. Your uncle, whose house we are living in, is not a well-to-do man. It is very good of him to let us live here, and you must not grumble. My own brother in Patna is a rich man, Ram, and I have written to him. I think he will help you to go to school again.'

Ram was more hopeful on hearing this. He waited in patience, but week after week passed without bringing any letter from Patna. Once more he commenced to be downhearted, and his mother could see that the lad was not happy.

Fresh trouble was to come to their house. Ram's uncle fell ill, and for some weeks could not leave the house. The doctor was sent for, and advised rest and medicine. This cost money, and so money had to be borrowed in the bazaar. What a difference sickness makes in a household, especially when it is the sickness of the one who earns for others ! Ram went about silently,

doing what he could to help. Every morning he went anxiously to see whether the postman had brought a letter from Patna. But day after day passed without a letter. He began to feel down-hearted and sad.

'How far is it to Patna, mother ?' he asked one day, as they sat together in the evening.

'More than a thousand miles, Ram.'

'How long would it take one to travel a thousand miles ?' said the lad, with a thought beginning to form in his mind.

His mother smiled, for she could see what he was thinking of. 'It would take less than three days, Ram, if one were to go by train,' she said. 'It would take weeks if you were a poor man, and had to go by foot, or in a bullock cart. So I advise you not to think of it.'

She spoke half in jest, but the lad was more serious than she thought. That night he could not sleep for a long time as he lay awake, deep in thought. Why should he stay there to be of no use to his mother ? If he could only have a little talk with this uncle in Patna, Ram would soon be a wage earner, and build up a home for her. There they would live together, and not need to be under an obligation to anyone else.

Gradually the plan formed in his mind, and became more clear. He could not hope to pay the train fare to Patna, nor could he walk the great distance to that place. But one lesson he had learned in his scout troop was to save up. 'A scout should be thrifty,' was still written down in the pocket-book that Ram had used when he was a patrol leader. So he had practised this for three years before the death of his dear father. As a result, Ram had fourteen rupees to his credit. Once it had been in the savings bank, but now the precious rupees were wrapped in cloth and locked in his little box.

The boy had intended to go on adding to this store of money. Then he had wondered whether he should give it to his mother. But now his duty seemed clear. He would use the money to travel to Patna, where he would soon meet with his mother's brother. This rich uncle would, no doubt, be glad to see him, and would be pleased with Ram for coming on such a long journey. Then there would be a start in life with some work in his uncle's business, and soon he would have a home for his mother. Ram's heart beat faster when he got as far as this in his thoughts, and he wondered why he had not thought of such a fine plan before.

Next day, Ram started to make his final preparations. Very carefully he counted over his little savings of three years. Fourteen rupees and nine annas! It seemed a great sum of money, all put out in one row of coins. Well, he would need a warm coat and a pair of shoes for the journey, and those things would lessen the sum. But it could not be helped, and so he went to the bazaar and bought a coat and a pair of sandals as cheaply as possible.

After that he went to the railway station, and made some enquiries. It seemed that, in order to go to Patna, Ram would have to travel by the Calcutta Mail. This train left the Central Terminus every night at 10.7 p.m. But Ram was amazed when he found out that it would cost him twenty rupees for a ticket to Patna. Now, only nine of his precious rupees remained, and so he saw that he would have to do a good part of the long journey on foot. But the thought of doing so did not trouble him at all, for he had often gone for a hike of more than twenty miles when in his scout troop. He decided that he would first buy a ticket to Badri, which was about a hundred miles away. Then he would commence the longest hike that he had ever attempted, and he had no doubt that a scout would not be likely to fail in the effort.

Ram decided that he would set out from home on the following night. But he was faced with the difficulty of leaving his mother, and he had many anxious thoughts about that. At last Ramadass decided, rather sadly, that it would not do to say 'Good bye!' to her. She would weep and try to prevent him from going. But if he went away without telling her, she would be very much upset, and would think that some accident had happened to him. What was to be done? After much thought, he carefully composed the following letter:

Written in our home.
3rd April, 1934.

My Dear Mother,

You will be very much surprised when you receive this letter from me. By the time you get it, I shall have left home. It is of no use remaining here, and doing the work of a house servant. I shall never be able to help myself or help you. So I am going to uncle Govind Dass in Patna. I am sure he has not received your letter, or does not understand properly. I shall explain everything to him, and I know he will give me a start in his business. Perhaps he will help me to finish my education first.

Do not be troubled about me, mother dear! I have money for the journey, and shall look after myself well. Before long I hope to have good news to tell you,

Your loving son,
Ram.

This he sealed in an envelope, and addressed to his mother. His plan was to send the letter from the station on the following night. Then he went to bed, and dreamed that he met the rich uncle of Patna, who was sitting surrounded by bags of money. Ram's mother looked at her boy, and saw that he smiled in his sleep, as if at some pleasant thought. She felt unhappy as she wondered what would become of him in the future.

CHAPTER II

RAMADASS LEAVES HOME

On the next evening, Ram said good night to his mother, and spread his bed about half-past nine. After about fifteen minutes or so, he knew by her breathing that she was asleep. Then he placed his letter on a little table, where she would be sure to see it, and stole softly out of the house. Soon he commenced to run at a slow and steady pace, for he did not want to miss the train. There were many people on the busy streets, as he came near the Central Terminus, and some looked with surprise at the boy. So Ram slowed down to a walk again.

A few passengers were waiting for their tickets before the barred window. Ram took his place at the end of the line, and felt rather anxious, for he saw that it was five minutes to ten. A very fat man, wearing a red cap, was in front of him. Ram looked at his great body and arms like those of a giant, and thought how strong such a man must be. He heard the man ask for a ticket to Badri, when his turn came. Then he also stepped boldly forward, and said :

'One half ticket to Badri, third class, please!'

'All right, little man!' said the Anglo-Indian clerk. 'You are running away from home, I suppose?'

Ram's heart gave a jump, and he felt his face trembling with excitement. How had his secret been discovered already? He almost left the office to dash back home again. But the clerk took his money and handed over the ticket without saying any more, and Ram soon saw that the man was only joking. It was rather an uncommon thing for him to see a small boy travelling alone, for in India people travel often by families.

Confident once more, the boy clasped his precious ticket. The man with the enormous body was just ahead of him, asking a ticket collector the way to the Calcutta Mail.

'Platform seven,' replied the collector, 'and you had better be quick.'

The man hurried through the entrance to platform seven, and Ram, after having his ticket clipped, followed. Just at that moment, the guard's whistle blew, so both scrambled quickly into the last third-class compartment on the train.

There was a bump, then a loud blast from the engine, and the train was off.

Ram had never been in a train before. For the first two minutes, the journey was through a long, dark tunnel, and the air inside the compartment became smoky and hot. Ram felt choking, for he was still breathing fast after his run to the station. But soon the train came out of the dark tunnel, and left the city behind. The sky was clear and covered with stars ; tall palm trees seemed to appear for a moment, and disappear. Ram felt better, and looked round him with interest.

There were eight men besides himself. Two were elderly men of the merchant class, with clean white dhoties and little round caps. Two others, almost entirely naked, seemed to be *fakirs* of the kind that we find all over India. Another man was in the uniform of a servant, and probably was the bearer of some first-class passenger. All these were quickly summed up by Ram, who had learned, as a scout, to use his powers of observation. He was not sure of the other three passengers, who were rather strong, rough-looking men, sitting together and talking in some tongue that he did not know. But they probably came from the north.

Just across from Ram, on the opposite seat, sat the great fellow that the boy had first noticed at the ticket-office. Now with more leisure, Ram again wondered at the man's bulk. 'His arms and legs are as big as my body!' he thought.

The big fellow saw the interest of the boy. 'Well, little fellow!' he said, 'are you travelling alone?'

'Yes,' replied Ram.

'Are you going far?' the big man enquired.

'To Badri,' answered Ram. He wondered whether that was the whole truth, since he was really going to Patna. The boy had always been taught to look upon falsehood of any kind as mean and unworthy. But the man had only asked about the train journey, and that was to Badri.

'You will find that a good place,' said the man with the big muscles. 'The *jhatra* is this week, and you will see the finest horses, bullocks, buffaloes, and even camels brought there to be sold. Moreover the Raja of Badri is giving very fine sports, and some of the best *pulwans* in the south will be there. Have you ever learned to wrestle, little friend?'

'No, but I learned a little about boxing at school,' Ram replied.

‘ Ah, that is all right, and requires skill and speed. But I think wrestling is more of a man’s sport, and produces strong men. I have practised for years, and look at my arms and body.’

He held out an enormous arm, and allowed Ram to examine it. The muscle was firm and hard, and yet the skin was clear and delicate. The boy thought that such an arm must be strong enough to knock a buffalo over.

‘ Were you always strong and big ? ’ he asked.

‘ No, not always. But I determined to make myself so. So I led a life of hard work, and never wasted my time. I always went to bed early and got up early. I ate good rice, bread made of wheat, and plenty of vegetables, and never drank anything but water. Whenever I got the chance, I took plenty of exercise, especially wrestling. Soon I was able to beat all the *pulwans* in my own village, and indeed there were none for miles who dared oppose me.’

Ram decided privately in his own mind that he would do all those things too, when next he got a chance. His head commenced to nod, for he was very tired, and it was long past his usual bed time. When the train stopped with a jerk at a wayside station, he almost fell to the floor.

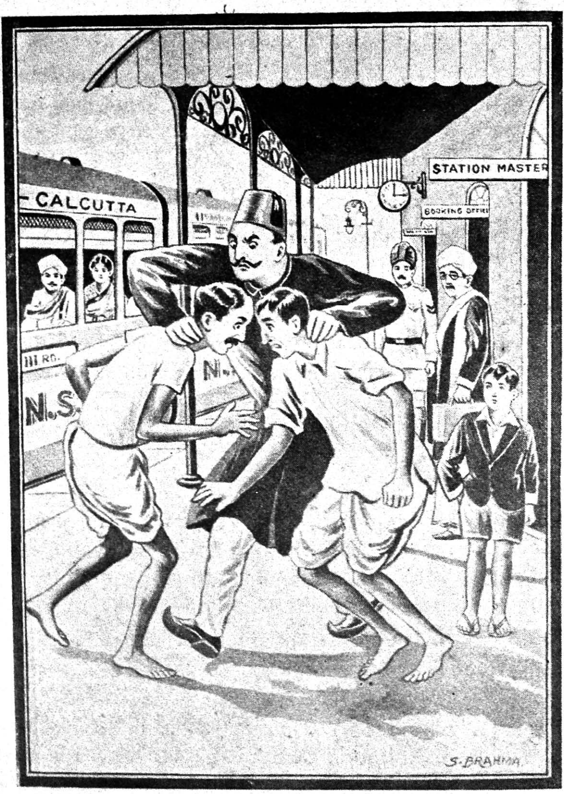
'You are tired, little brother,' said the big fellow. 'Lie along the seat, and go to sleep.' He set the example by stretching himself out, for there was plenty of room in the compartment. Ram did as he was told, and soon was in a deep slumber.

He was awakened by the feeling that something was touching him. The train was at a standstill at a small station, and a man was bending over Ramadass' head. The boy could feel fingers inside the breast of his coat. He sprang up with a cry of fear, and recognised one of the three rough-looking men who had talked in an unknown tongue. Quickly the man jumped out on to the platform.

'What has he done to you, little one?' the big passenger on the other side asked. He had just awakened from sleep, and now he stood on his feet, rubbing his eyes. Suddenly he cried out:

'My box! They have taken it!'

Then Ram saw that the big fellow's tin trunk, which was in the rack when they went asleep, had disappeared. Quickly the angry owner ran out to the platform. He could just see one of the three strangers passing out of the station with



'HE CAUGHT THE TWO MEN ONE IN EACH HAND AND BANGED THEIR HEADS TOGETHER.'

the box on his shoulders. He tried to dash after him, but the other two men threw themselves in his path, and delayed him. One of them caught the big man by the arm, and shouted :

'What are you making all this fuss about ?'

Ram was surprised to see what happened. The man with the big muscles did not waste time in words. He caught the two men, one in each hand, and banged their heads together. Then he threw them into a corner of the platform, where the sweepers had assembled a mass of rubbish, and once more dashed after the thief. But the man had driven off quickly in a tonga, and no other was to be had.

'At least I shall hand his two friends over to the police,' shouted the angry owner. He came back to the place where he had left the two other passengers. But they did not wish for a second taste of his strength, and took to their heels.

'Well, what are we to do now ?' asked Ram. 'The train is about to start.'

There was a short talk with a station ticket-inspector, who promised to do what he could. It was a small station, and there was only one policeman. This man did not seem intelligent, and kept asking silly questions instead of running after the robber.

'Now,' shouted the guard, 'I cannot keep the mail any longer. Are you coming on, or are you going to wait here and look after your box ?'

'I cannot wait,' grumbled the big traveller, 'and I must go to Badri to-day. Come, little brother, let us get in !'

In a few seconds, the train was again speeding on. It was growing lighter, and the green fields and toddy-palms seemed to rush past. Then Ram's travelling companion said, with satisfaction :

'Well, it is fortunate that I had all my money in my clothes, over two hundred rupees.' And he passed his hand inside his loose cloth to make sure that it was safe. Then he sat up with a start, and looked more carefully. The money was gone.

With a fear in his heart, Ram examined the pocket of his coat, where he had kept his precious rupees. But it was empty. The few rupees, carefully tied up in a handkerchief, had gone. Tears started to his eyes.

'So they have robbed you too, little friend !' grumbled the big fellow. 'Well, we may meet those fine fellows again some day and come to a reckoning with them. In the meantime, here is

Badri, and I see they have left us our railway tickets, at any rate.'

The train was slowing down at a large and busy station, and soon it stopped. Slowly the two made their way along the platform, gave up their tickets, and left the noisy station.

CHAPTER III

THE 'JHATRA' AT BADRI

It was still early morning, and the day was cool. The large man and the small boy walked together in silence, till they came to a quiet street. A small shop was open, where a signboard told them that tea was to be had.

'Let us eat and drink, little friend,' said the big man, 'and tell me, what is your name?'

Ram told him, speaking in rather a shaky voice. His heart was heavy as lead when he thought of the loss of all his money, and the difficulties before him now seemed ten times greater. His new friend saw that the lad was greatly troubled.

'Cheer up, Ram,' he said, 'and do not look so miserable. Look at me! I may as well tell you that my name is Fakr Bux, and the two hundred rupees I have lost mean a great deal to me. But I am not going to sit down and weep over it.'

Here Fakr Bux gave a great laugh, and it was so hearty that even Ram could not help smiling. It even made a crow fly away quickly, and then return to look with curiosity at the two.

‘You are right,’ said Ram, ‘and I am forgetting the lesson which I learned—“A Scout is cheerful at all times.” But I wonder how I am to get to Patna now.’

‘Sit down,’ said Fakr Bux. ‘Though my money is gone, I still have a few annas left. We shall eat and drink, and then our troubles will appear less.’

They entered the small shop, made some purchases, and found a seat under a gold-mohur tree. Over their heads, the scarlet blossoms trembled in the morning breeze. The sun had arisen, and the golden light fell on the two seated there. The sun saw a large man and a small boy feasting on chupatty, vegetable curry, and bread cakes. Ram did indeed feel better after the food.

‘Now,’ said Fakr Bux, ‘tell me how it comes that a little fellow like you is travelling to Patna all alone.’

Ram had been troubled in his mind for some hours. Had he acted rightly in leaving home secretly? He looked into the open face and kindly eyes of Fakr Bux, and felt that here was a man to be trusted. In a moment he was pouring out the whole story. His new friend listened in silence.

‘Hum!’ he muttered, when Ram had finished. ‘You have not done well, Ram. A boy’s

first duty is obedience to his parents, and he should avoid giving them trouble. How grieved your poor mother must be now!'

This went to Ram's heart, and Fakr Bux saw a tear appear, which the boy tried to hide. 'Come,' he said, 'we must think the matter over. I have a good friend in the place you have come from. I shall write to him at once, and tell him you are in my care. He will see your mother, and tell her that all is well; after that, we will think how two men can go to Patna without money. I had meant to go there myself.'

The letter was soon written and posted. Ram's heart felt lighter. Then the two walked side by side along the streets, and soon were on the outside of the city. A great number of people were assembled there, and Ram could see coloured flags and could hear the sounds of music.

'It is the *jhatra*' said Fakr Bux; 'let us go!'

They walked through the crowd. In one corner were the horses, and Ram admired their soft eyes and glossy coats. Then they had a look at the bullocks, which were being shown by their owners, and Ram admired the size and strength of the fine animals. The best pair had already been

selected for the first prize, and they seemed twice as large as ordinary bulls.

A great wall of canvas enclosed a space. Sounds of cheering came from inside.

'This is where the sports are held,' said Fakr Bux. 'The Raja loves sports ; let us go in and see.'

They entered, and found hundreds of people sitting round an open space. The Raja and his family were seated on chairs under a sheltering canvas. Men were shouting with excitement. In the middle of the open space, a fight was going on between two buffaloes. They rushed at each other and fought with their long horns. Ram could hear the panting breath of the buffaloes, and could see the dust thrown up as they struggled. He did not like the sight.

'It is wrong, Ram,' said his big companion. 'The poor animals would always be peaceful and gentle, if left alone. But men stir them up to fight, and call it sport. Well, some day the law will forbid such things.'

When the buffalo-fight was over, men started making ready another place, where the ground was soft and covered with sand. Then two wrestlers came forward, almost naked, with their strong bodies like statues.

'This is better,' said Fakr Bux. 'This is a manly sport, and far better than hurting poor animals. They wrestle very well.'

They watched several bouts among the light weights. Then the people murmured with excitement, as if awaiting something. Fakr Bux heard a man say, 'Now we shall see Malkar, the great champion! The Raja has offered five hundred rupees to any man who can wrestle with Malkar for five minutes, and not be thrown.'

All the people clapped their hands as a great fellow came forward. Malkar was indeed a splendid man, over six feet high, and with great muscles. Everyone looked in wonder at his arms and body.

Then his opponent came out, and he was also a fine fellow, but not so strong as the champion. But he was no match for Malkar, who put him down easily in less than two minutes. A second man appeared, but he was thrown by Malkar in less than a minute.

Fakr Bux's eyes shone with excitement. 'It seems there is no one here good enough,' he said. 'Well, Ram, I have never wrestled against a champion before, and I would like to try.'

Before the boy could reply, he jumped into the ring and challenged the champion. Malkar

was very willing, and soon Fakr Bux had undressed, except for a pair of wrestling knickers. The two men faced each other in the ring, and Ram's heart beat with excitement.

Malkar was five inches taller than his opponent, and had great arms and a broad chest. His beautiful body and arms would have attracted an artist. Fakr Bux was shorter, but seemed stronger in the legs. Most of the people seemed to think he had little chance, but Ram remembered how he had seen his friend deal with the two big men on the platform of the railway station.

They moved round each other on tip-toe, looking for a chance. Malkar seemed the quicker of the two, and moved in and out like a mongoose fighting a snake. Suddenly he sprang in and the two men came to grips. Malkar had the better hold, and Fakr Bux was forced to his knees. For about a minute, it seemed that Fakr Bux would be turned over on to his shoulders. But suddenly he caught hold of Malkar's leg and gave a pull. For a moment Malkar was in danger, and had to leap back. With panting breath, the two faced each other once more.

Ram could hardly breathe in his excitement. Three minutes had gone, and Fakr Bux was hold-

ing his own. Malkar did not like this, and again sprang in to get a hold. Once more the two men were close together, arms around each other. The people were shouting out encouragement, some to Malkar and some to Fakr Bux.

With a quick movement, Malkar again got a good hold behind his opponent. Ram sighed, for his friend seemed in difficulty. The crowd too shouted, ' Bravo, Malkar ! Malkar wins! '

Fakr Bux bent his knees a little, and all saw him make a great effort. With one heave, he lifted Malkar off the ground and over his head. Before his opponent could rise, Fakr Bux was on the top of him, and Malkar's shoulders had been pressed to the ground. Just when he had seemed defeated, Fakr Bux had won.

The excitement was great, and men came pressing round to congratulate the victor. Even Malkar, who seemed a fine sportsman, gave him a hearty hand-shake. Then Fakr Bux was led before the Maharajah, who congratulated him on his fine win, and presented him with a fine silver cup. He offered him five notes for a hundred rupees each. Fakr Bux salaamed deeply, and took his leave of the generous Raja. Then he walked across to where Malkar sat with a downcast expression. He pressed one of the notes into his hand.

'Do not be cast down, brother,' he said. 'I am older than you, and I know how bad I felt when I was first beaten. You are a fine wrestler, and will be better yet.'

Malkar's face lighted up with a smile for he was a good sportsman at heart. He shook the hand of the generous Fakr Bux, and they left the field and saw him no more.

CHAPTER IV

IN THE JUNGLE

‘Well,’ said Fakr Bux, ‘our money difficulties have gone. What shall we do now, Ram?’

‘I must get on to Patna,’ said Ram, ‘but how am I to do so? I have not defeated a wrestling champion and won a fortune.’

‘Peace, little brother! We were comrades in misfortune, for we were robbed together. Would you not have shared with me, had you suddenly met with good fortune?’

‘Of course I would,’ said Ram.

‘Then say no more. But let us carry out part of your plan, for it suits me to go to the north. But first I have a cousin to visit who lives in Karagal, a big village about fifty miles from here. The railway does not go there yet, so we will make our way there by road. We may find a motor bus, though I hate the noisy, dusty things, or we may find some friendly driver of a bullock cart. And if not, are we not men, Ram, and did not God intend man to walk on his own legs?’

'Yes, of course we shall walk,' said the boy. 'It will be very fine to camp out at nights. What shall we do after we have seen your cousin ?'

'We will strike north again, and then we will come after thirty miles to Bezi junction,' said the big fellow. 'Then we shall go on the G. I. P. Railway, or we can stop at any other part of the journey again.'

'All right,' Ram agreed. 'There is no great hurry, now that my mother knows everything.'

They slept that night at the *dharmasala* and next morning set out on the great dusty road which left Badri on the east. For the first five miles, the cool air of the morning made their walk pleasant. Then the sun commenced to rise higher and higher, and drops of sweat appeared on Fakr Bux's broad forehead. Two motor buses and several motor cars passed them, throwing up clouds of dust. Each time this happened, they had to breathe through a handkerchief or the end of a *dhoti,* to keep the dust out of their lungs.

'This is not comfortable,' said the boy. 'Shall we take seats on the next bus ?'

'No,' answered his friend ; 'after one mile more, we shall leave the main road.'

Sure enough, he led the way on to a narrow road between hedges of thorn. Deep ruts were in the road, and stones stuck out. It was all right for the slow bullock carts that came along, but no motor car could have used such a road.

'Ah!' said Fakr Bux, breathing in the pure air; 'it is fifteen years since I have been on this road. Look, little brother, how pure the air is already, though we are only half a mile away from the main road. Look how green are the leaves of the trees, and hear how the birds sing!'

'Yes,' said Ram. 'This is better than a motor car.'

'You speak truth,' said his big companion. 'Our fathers travelled by bullock cart, and took plenty of time. They saw around them the beauties of nature, and blessed God who made them. Now they go along in cars at forty or fifty miles an hour, and throw dust on the green fields and on poor men. They think of nothing but speed, and forget what the country looks like.'

'But a motor car is very useful if one is in a great hurry,' said Ram. 'What if one had to get a doctor for a sick man?'

'Yes,' admitted his companion, 'but men now-a-days are always in a hurry. They spend

their lives hurrying up and down, and wear out their nerves. I like this better.'

For mile after mile they went on, and Ram enjoyed every step of the way. Towards mid-day, the sun was high and the breeze had dropped. The jungle had quietened, and even the birds seemed oppressed by the mid-day heat.

'All things rest now,' said Fakr Bux. 'Let us follow their example.'

They found an immense peepul tree, which cast a pleasant shade. Under the tree the leaves lay thickly, dried and rustling. They made their couches under the tree, and stretched themselves out.

'This is a good tree' said Fakr Bux, as he looked up at the spreading branches. 'Always select a peepul tree, Ram, for good shelter. A nim tree is even better, and I have heard that any disease in the world may be cured by sleeping under a nim tree. But the tamarind tree is to be avoided, for its effect is not good.'

But he received no answer to his wise remarks, for Ram was already asleep. The long walk and the excitement of the previous day had tired him out. So the big wrestler also drew his rug over his limbs, covered his head, and followed Ram's example.

It must have been two hours later when Ram was awakened by the sound of voices. His companion was engaged in conversation with a small, strong-looking man, who looked like a dweller in the jungle. Ram did not know the language they were using. Presently the little man departed.

'Who was that, and what language were you talking ?' asked Ram.

'He is a wood-cutter from one of the villages,' said Fakr Bux. 'I was speaking his language, which is Marathi. He does not understand either your Telugu or my Urdu. It is fortunate that I have learned a little of his language, for he tells me that there is a tiger in the jungle. It was wounded some days ago by a shikari, but not killed. So we must go carefully, for a wounded tiger is very dangerous.'

Accordingly they pushed on, to reach a village before darkness fell. The sun slowly sank below the tops of the palm trees. A beautiful peacock screamed in the jungle, and then flew out before them. Green parrots flew out and attracted the eye with their bright feathers, but displeased the ear with their screams.

'So it is in life,' said Fakr Bux to the boy. 'It is often the most richly-dressed men who speak with harsh and unkind voices.'

The sun sank lower and disappeared. No signs of life were to be seen ; a jackal howled near them in the jungle. Dark shadows commenced to grow between the trees. They went on and on, till it became difficult to see the path.

'We shall not reach any village,' said Ram. 'We had better camp for the night. Look, there is a fire!' And he pointed to a light on the ground near the path.

'You are right,' said his companion. 'Let us see who has lit a fire here.'

It turned out to be the same little wood-cutter, sitting over a fire of wood, and holding his sharp axe. He sprang up as they approached, as if to run away. When he saw who it was, he invited them to sit.

'Well, we will share his fire,' said Fakr Bux. 'Look for some water, Ram. We will make what kind of supper we can.'

Ram found a small stream, and soon they had some ears of Indian corn roasting over the fire. They had brought some bread from Badri, and soon had a fair meal. Then they washed, and lay in comfort by the fire.

'We had better have plenty of dry wood,' said the big wrestler, 'and keep up the fire all night. That tiger may also want his supper.'

He proceeded to gather a fine heap of wood, and then all wrapped themselves up and lay down. Ram saw the bushes lighted up around, and the great form of Fakr Bux beside the thin body of the wood-cutter. Then he fell into a deep sleep.

Suddenly he awoke with a start. There had been no noise, but he knew that something was wrong. Both his companions were asleep. Suddenly his eye caught two strange green lights, very close together, among the bushes. His heart beat fast. It was the tiger !

There was a terrific roar as the animal rushed in. With one spring it reached the fire, and caught hold of the sleeping wood-cutter in its great jaws. Then it turned and made off for the jungle. But Ram had acted at once, almost without thinking. Instantly he grasped hold of the animal's tail as it rushed past him, and hung on with determination. He was dragged along the ground, and the breath was knocked out of his body. Thorns tore his skin and he felt blood trickling down his face, but he clenched his teeth and kept his hold.

The tiger was a large one, but it soon felt the difficulty of its double load. Moreover its fore leg had been broken by the bullet of the shikari, who had wounded it in the first place. It came to a

'INSTANTLY HE GRASPED HOLD OF THE ANIMAL'S TAIL . . .'

killing the poison. Some iodine would have been better, but we have none here.'

Having cleansed the little man's wounds and bound them up, they all lay down once more, after throwing wood on the fire. This time they slept peacefully till morning light, without any further alarms.

CHAPTER V

RAM FOILS A CONSPIRACY

It seemed that Government had offered a reward for the killing of the tiger. When they awakened next morning, Fakr Bux and the woodcutter set about the task of removing the skin. It was a slow process, and by no means agreeable. Ram took himself off as far as possible from them, and commenced to explore the jungle. He tried to see how many strange leaves and berries he could discover.

A beautiful peacock rose up before him, and flew over the tree tops. Ram watched it for some three or four hundred yards, and saw it settle on the branch of a mango-tree. But instantly it sprang up again, with quick flapping of wings, and disappeared over the trees. Ram's scouting brain was aroused at once.

'Something frightened that peacock,' he reasoned to himself, 'and it was something beside that mango tree. It can hardly be another tiger, but may be some man.'

He decided to find out, and put his scouting to the test. First he stood up to see in which direc-

tion the wind might be blowing. There was very little indeed, but what little there was seemed to blow from the tree to him. So if there was any animal there, he need not fear that his scent would be carried by the wind.

Silently Ram worked his way through the jungle. He kept behind the trunks of the largest trees, and did not show himself in any open space. He took great care not to step on the dry leaves, which rustled so loudly, or on any twig which might break under his foot. Well he knew how any strange sound is easily heard in the jungle. He came nearer and nearer the large mango-tree.

He stopped and sniffed the air. The gentle breeze brought to his nostrils a faint smell of burning wood. There was a fire near the mango-tree. The peacock had been disturbed by man, and not by any animal. More carefully than ever he moved forward, taking care to make no sound.

Just under the tree, three men sat around a fire made of branches and dead wood. A smell of cooking told Ram that they were preparing their morning meal. As the boy looked, the man, who was preparing chupatties over the fire, looked up. Ram started. Where had he seen that face before ? Where had he seen that black moustache with upturned ends ? He crawled nearer, taking

shelter behind a thick bush, and looked between the leaves.

There was no doubt about it ! That was the face that had bent over him in the railway train ! Ram examined the other two, and soon was quite sure. It was the same group of men who had travelled in the train with them, and had robbed Fakr Bux and himself. Now there was real need for caution, if he was going to find out what the rascals were doing in that lonely spot. He lay flat on the ground, and crawled nearer, inch by inch. Soon he was within five yards of them. But alas ! He could not understand their language. They were talking together, and one was reading from a paper to the others.

After a while, they finished, and prepared to eat. As he folded the paper and put it away, the man spoke in English for the first time :

" Well, we shall meet them this evening, and then we shall make all preparation for visiting Allah Bux to-morrow night. How pleased he will be to see us ! '

They seemed about to move on, so Ram carefully crawled out of sight. When he was at a safe distance, he started to run, and soon reached the place where his friend and the wood-cutter were

finishing their unpleasant task. Quickly Ram told his story. Fakr Bux listened with interest.

'So they still remain our fellow travellers,' he said. 'Well, I am glad, for I hoped that some day I would meet those gentlemen again. We shall go and have a little talk with them.'

As he spoke, he prepared a large and heavy stick, by removing the leaves and twigs from a branch. He swung it round his head with ease, and Ram almost felt sorry for the three rascals. Quickly Ram led the way back through the jungle to the mango-tree, Fakr Bux following in silence with the great club in readiness.

As they came near the place, Ram stopped and made a sign for silence. It was just as well. No less than eleven men were to be counted there. They were all wild-looking fellows with *lathis*, and two of them carried guns.

'So!' said Fakr Bux thoughtfully, 'they are not merely dishonest travellers, Ram. These men are leaders of a gang of dacoits. Quietly, Ram!'

They stole away without a sound, and came back to the place where they had camped.

'So they spoke of visiting Allah Bux to-morrow?' asked Fakr Bux. 'Are you sure you heard the name properly?'

'Quite sure,' replied the boy. 'I was quite close to them, and could not be mistaken. Who is Allah Bux?'

'That is the name of my cousin in Karagal, the village to which we are going. He is the chief man in the village, and owns a good deal of the land round about. He is fairly wealthy, and it would seem that those *budmashes* are intending to pay him a visit. We must get there first, Ram.'

They put out their fire, lest it should set the jungle alight. Then Fakr Bux wrapped the tiger's skin, and lifted it on to his shoulders. They said good-bye to the little wood-cutter, who seemed none the worse for his narrow escape from the tiger's jaws. Then they set out on their journey to Karagal, keeping a good watch in case they should meet unexpectedly with the robbers.

After a walk of about three miles, they left the jungle and came to a better road. That again led them to the main road, and soon a motor bus came along.

'We will ride for a little now, Ram,' said the big fellow, 'for this tiger's skin is very heavy and our business urgent. I do not think Karagal can be more than fifteen miles off now.'

He proved to be correct, for in about three quarters of an hour they reached Karagal. It

proved to be a large village of about two thousand inhabitants. Soon they found the house of Fakr Bux's cousin, and indeed it was easy to find, for it was the biggest house in the village. Evidently Allah Bux was a man of some importance in the place, and very well known.

He proved to be a tall man of about fifty years, with white hairs appearing plentifully in his black beard. He greeted them with great kindness, and embraced his cousin. Soon baths were prepared for the two dusty travellers, and Ram was glad to make himself clean and tidy again. After about half an hour, they came out clean and fresh, and joined their host.

'What is this evil-smelling thing that you have brought with you, my cousin?' asked their host.

They told him the story of their encounter with the tiger, and Ram noticed that his friend mentioned it as if it were an every-day event. Fakr Bux, in his story, made much of Ram's pluck, but said little about his own mighty stroke with the axe. The kindly host patted Ram on the back.

'Bravo, my boy! That is the kind of thing which makes me proud of our young men. Not many would have dared to do that. But now,

Fakr Bux, have it sent down to the taluqdar's office, for there is a reward of one hundred rupees for this tiger. It has been killing many cattle and goats in the villages.'

A servant was sent with the striped skin, and a note to the taluqdar. Then Fakr Bux related to his cousin the meeting with the dacoits in the jungle, and told him what Ram had overheard. He also described their first meeting with the leaders of the gang in the railway train.

'So ho!' said Allah Bux, 'they mentioned my name, and they think of visiting me, do they? Well, I am glad that I know, for I shall be able to prepare warm hospitality for them. This is the time of year when I keep a good sum of money in my house, and the rascals must have heard of this. But you have been too clever for them, Ram.'

'Will you send for the police to be ready?' asked the boy.

'I think not. The thieves might get the news and be too frightened to come. What we want to do is to capture the rascals, so that they can no longer go about the country robbing people. We have plenty of strong fellows in the village to deal with them.'

They spent the rest of the day in resting, and in the evening, Ram walked with the two men for a little distance out of the town. The story of the tiger had evidently become known, for it had been a famous animal for some time. Indeed the printed paper, which offered a hundred rupees reward for killing the animal, was still fixed outside the taluqdar's office.

Two or three times they met friends of Allah Bux, and each time they were asked, 'Is this the boy who killed the tiger?' Ram wanted to explain how it actually happened, but the good-natured Fakr Bux would take none of the credit.

'You did it all, Ram,' he said. 'Had it not been for you, the tiger would have been off with that poor man, and I would not have had a chance.'

A number of boys passed on their way home from school. Ram saw them look at him, and heard the whisper passing from one to another. They too were looking on him as a hero. Ram began to be tired of it all, for he was naturally a modest boy. As a scout, he had been taught never to think about his own affairs with too much pride. So he was glad when they reached home, and he was able to retire for the night.

CHAPTER VI

A WARM RECEPTION

Next morning, Ram had his simple morning meal and then went out to look for his friends. He found Fakr Bux, and they walked together out of the village. The morning air was cool, and the village people were astir. Outside the village, an old man with a leather belt round his waist was preparing to climb a tall palm tree. Ram looked on with interest, for it was a very tall tree, and the man was very old.

But the climber knew his work well. Up he went, bit by bit, till he reached the top, and they could see him taking the juice from the *chatties*.

'What is that man doing, Ram?' asked Fakr Bux.

'Why, he is drawing the juice from the toddy palm,' replied the boy, who wondered at the question.

'And what will he do with it?'

'It will be sold in the liquor shop in the village,' said Ram.

'Have you ever seen the men who buy this toddy, on their way home?' continued the big man, very seriously.

'Yes,' said Ram, 'and they look so funny, rolling about on the road, and sometimes crying out.'

'It is not funny, Ram,' said his friend, with a serious face. 'What the old man is taking from the tree now is a simple juice. But in an hour or two it begins to change, and becomes bad. Instead of a pleasant drink, it becomes a poison.'

Ram was puzzled. 'Why do men drink it, then?' he asked. 'Surely it must be unpleasant to drink?'

'Yes, it is unpleasant. But unfortunately men can come to like unpleasant things. This drink upsets their brains and makes them excited, and they imagine that they are happy. Remember that those who drink toddy are poor and uneducated men.'

'I did not know it did them harm,' said Ram.

'Yes,' said his big friend. 'It harms them in mind and body. It harms them in purse too, and it harms their innocent families, for money which is needed for food and clothing is spent in the liquor shop. Give me your hand, Ram!'

Ram stopped in wonder, and gripped Fakr Bux's enormous hand. The giant looked seriously into his eyes :

'Promise me, Ram, to do one thing. We are friends now, and we have faced trouble and danger together. I want you to make this promise.'

Ram was moved by his friend's sincerity, and said :

'Certainly, I will promise anything that pleases you.'

'Then promise me that you will never touch alcohol in any form, as long as you live.'

'Of course I promise,' said Ram, 'on my honour as a scout. It will be a very easy promise to keep, for I have not the least desire to taste the stuff.'

'Thank you for that, Ram.'

Fakr Bux walked on for some time in silence, as if in deep thought. Before they returned home, he removed his shoes and went into a small *masjid* to say his prayers. Then they returned to his cousin's house and spent a quiet day. Ram found it a pleasant household and

was deeply interested in some old books he found. Gradually the day came to an end.

Had anyone noticed that house, he would have observed one thing. After sunset, a number of visitors came to Allah Bux's house, sometimes one and sometimes two. But no one would have noticed them go away again. The reason was that they all waited in the courtyard behind the house, until about twenty strong villagers were there. But Ram thought they seemed rather small men, compared with the dacoits.

'Will they be able to fight well, Fakr Bux ?' he asked in some doubt. 'These men are used to working in the fields, but not to fighting.'

Fakr Bux smiled.' These men are Maharattas Ram,' he said, 'and have always been good fighters. Even the Moguls found that they were brave opponents. You will find, Ram, that all men are brave when there is a need of defending their homes. Wait and you will see !'

Most of the villagers had strong *lathis,* for Allah Bux would not allow them either swords or guns. 'We want to defend our homes and our property,' he said, 'but I would not like to see wounds and blood. I would rather lose all I have than see a single life lost.'

It was now past ten o'clock, and most of the people of the village were asleep. Nothing could be heard except the sound of a drum, and some singing from a marriage procession. Then the moon rose and cast its pale light over the village. A dog started to howl near at hand.

Ram was not allowed to stay downstairs, although he had begged to be allowed to do so. But Fakr Bux did not wish to see the boy injured. So he was told to remain on the house and keep watch from the roof.

Another hour passed slowly, and the moon rose in the sky. The boy commenced to think that nothing was going to happen, and that he would be better in bed. He yawned once or twice, and felt his eyes beginning to close. Down in the courtyard, there was silence, and Fakr Bux and his party waited patiently.

Suddenly Ram was once more wakeful. Four or five dark figures were coming silently along the street. He saw them as they passed an oil lamp, and knew that they were not village people. Then he saw another group coming in the opposite direction. Ram miaowed like a cat, for he had agreed to do this as soon as he saw anything.

The two parties met just outside Allah Bux's house, and examined the large gate. It was

locked, but the little door in the middle of the gate had been left open. The robbers commenced to enter, one by one, into the courtyard.

Fakr Bux made no sign till about ten men were inside. Then he called out in his great voice :

'Now, men, show these visitors what you think of them.'

At once the villagers sprang from their hiding places, and attacked the dacoits with great fury. A rain of blows fell on the backs of the robbers, taking them absolutely by surprise. Fakr Bux closed the door of the courtyard, so that no more could enter from the street. Cries of fear and pain arose, along with the sound of heavy blows, and the leader of the band outside did not know what was happening. Ram shouted with glee and excitement from the roof above.

But victory had not yet been gained. The men inside recovered from their surprise, and several of them drew swords. The leader of the outside party climbed up the courtyard wall, and saw how things stood. A large pile of wood and branches lay just below him, and into this he dropped a lighted match. At once flames sprang up, and made the courtyard as light as day. At the same time, the robbers still outside were

attacking the door with an axe. A shot from a gun rang out.

When the robbers saw that they had only villagers against them, they became more confident. But they found that the men of the village handled their *lathis* with skill, and they could not use their swords because of the *lathi* blows. Ram found a great *chatti* of water on the roof, and poured it down on the fire. The flames died down, and the robbers dared not use their guns for fear of hitting their own men. The struggle went on in the moonlight.

At that moment, the courtyard gate fell down with a crash. The outside robbers had broken the lock with their axes, and now commenced to pour into the courtyard. They yelled with glee, and it seemed as if the villagers might be defeated. The leader was a great fellow with a black beard, and he waved a long sword in his hand. Another fierce-looking fellow started to climb up to the roof of the house.

The villagers commenced to waver. Two or three of them were on the ground, stunned by heavy blows. At that moment, a great shout was heard. The whole courtyard was again lighted up, as the wood once more blazed up. Fakr Bux sprang into the fight, with a great club of

wood in his hand. He had waited for this moment.

Swinging the club round his head, he attacked the dacoits. At every blow a man went down before him. They drew back in fear ; it was like a lion attacking a pack of jackals. The villagers regained their courage, and joined in the attack again.

The robber-leader saw that his plans might fail. He was a great fellow, over six feet in height, and he rushed at Fakr Bux. But Ram's friend seized the man as if he had been a child, and threw him five yards away. The man fell in a corner, feeling as if he had been charged by an elephant. The dacoits commenced to hesitate.

At that moment, the other robber had reached the roof. He tried to help his friends and frighten the villagers, and shouted down :

'Now I have set fire to the house.'

All looked up at the man standing on the edge of the roof. But the fellow had not noticed Ram, who stood just behind him in the shadow. The boy came quietly up and gave a great push. With a cry of fear, the robber fell down into the yard. There was a mighty splash, and they saw that he had fallen right into a great barrel which held all the rubbish and dirty water of the house.

This was too much for the dacoits, and they began to give way. One or two started to leave the fight, and get out of the broken gate. Then it became a race among the others to get out first. Soon all the dacoits were in retreat, but Fakr Bux and his villagers continued to follow them with heavy blows. The courtyard was empty, except for three of the robbers who lay on the ground. They were only stunned, and sat up when water was thrown in their faces. So they were locked up in a shed for the night.

'Go home, now, brothers,' said Fakr Bux to the villagers. 'You have fought like brave men and shown that you can defend your homes. I am proud of you.'

The simple villagers departed, each with a fine present of cloth or grain from Allah Bux. Then the boy Ramadass felt very sleepy, and so they all retired to bed for the night. Ram slept soundly and dreamed of his mother.

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CHAPTER VII

ON TO PATNA

Next morning, Ram wakened and wondered whether he had been dreaming. But it was all real enough when he came down to the courtyard. There were the broken *lathis,* and two or three old swords which the robbers had left behind them. Soon a tall police inspector and two constables arrived and took away the three prisoners. Other police were out in pursuit of the gang, and they were sure that most of them would be captured.

Later on, the taluqdar of the district called, and complimented Fakr Bux and Ram on all that they had done. It seemed that the police had been after the gang for a long time. One of them was a well-known dacoit called Dattria, for whom a reward of a hundred rupees had been offered. To the joy of the police, this man was one of the three prisoners. It was the robber whom Ram had thrown down from the roof of the house.

When the taluqdar heard this, he at once summoned Ram to the office and paid him the reward. Great was the boy's joy, for he had never possessed so much money in all his life.

'Why, you are rich now, Ram!' said Fakr Bux, who was delighted to see the boy so happy. 'What will you do with so much money?'

Ram thought for a moment. 'I shall send half of it at once to mother,' he said, 'and the rest will help me on my journey to Patna.'

'Splendid,' said Fakr Bux. 'Let us go to the post office and you can send off a money-order at once. Then we must be getting ready for our journey again. I think we may set off to-morrow morning.'

So they went to the post office and the business was done. It happened that same evening that a party of scouts had come to camp near the village, and they heard of what had happened. Ram was invited to attend their camp-fire in the evening. He did so, and their delight was great when they found that Ram was a brother scout. When he left them to go home, the Troop Leader drew the scouts up in a line, and they all saluted Ram, and gave the troop yell in his honour. The lad felt shy, but very happy.

Next morning, they prepared to set off once more. The kind-hearted Allah Bux pressed them to remain for a few days more, but Ram said that he must go on to Patna. Fakr Bux could have stayed. But the generous fellow had taken a

liking to the boy, and decided to go with him. So after many affectionate farewells, and many respectful salaams from the village people, they started again. They meant to walk the twenty miles to Bezi, and then take train once more.

A group of the kindly villagers accompanied them out of the town, and then wished them a safe and pleasant journey. Ram saw a number of the men who had fought so well in the courtyard, and shook hands with them all. Then Fakr Bux and he set off once again on their travels.

For a mile or two, they walked in silence. Ram was deep in thought. At last he broke the silence :

'Fakr Bux, I have always thought that village people were no good at fighting. Yet those men fought very well.'

'I am glad you saw that, Ram. Those men are simple and honest. They have led peaceful lives, and are used to tilling their fields. But you have seen that they will fight very bravely if their homes are threatened. Never make the mistake of thinking that men are not brave because they live peaceful lives for most of the time.'

'It is a pity they have not more education,' said Ram. 'Some of them have never been to school.'

'You are only partly right,' answered his friend. 'Now some of those villagers are well enough known to me. They can go into the jungle at any time, and tell the name of every plant and tree. They know the proper time of the year to sow rice and jawari, and they know how to look after the crops when they are growing. They know where to dig down for water, and they can tell from the sky when it will rain and when it will remain dry. Do you know all those things, Ram?'

Ram had to admit that he did not. It was a new idea to him, and he thought it over. 'Do you mean to say that it is not necessary to teach them to read and write, and to teach them arithmetic?' asked he.

'No,' said Fakr Bux. 'I think they must be taught to read and write in their own language. And the great trouble with those simple people is that they have no idea of the value of money. They borrow from the *bunnia* and forget that the money has to be paid back. They do not know whether the interest on their loan is too much or not. So I would have them all learn some arithmetic.'

'Then they do need education, you see!' said Ram.

'Yes, but one must not carry it on too far. If they are given too much book-work, then they want to leave their villages and their fields, and become clerks in the city. Too much school is bad for the villagers, Ram. But they should all be taught how to avoid disease, how to make proper drains in their villages, how to keep rats and mosquitoes out of their homes.'

So talking, they went on for mile after mile. By mid-day it was very hot, and they decided to rest. A few shady trees stood not far from the road, and towards the cool shadows they went for shelter from the sun.

'Somebody is before us,' said Ram. 'I see a fire under the trees, and some people around it.'

As they came nearer, they found that it was the scout troop they had met the night before at Karagal. Those boys had been out for a week-end camp, and now had started back even earlier than Fakr Bux and Ram. They shouted out greetings as our two heroes came up. Ram saw that the boys were cooking chupatty and rice for their mid-day meal.

When the meal was ready, the two of them sat down with the scouts and had their share. They did not mind doing this, as they were able to share with the boys the fruit and the sweetmeats that

Allah Bux had given them on parting. Then the boys pressed Fakr Bux to tell them the full story of the tiger and the dacoits, for they had already heard something. The big man was unwilling, for he was not a great talker. But at last he related the full story to them. So they spent the afternoon, with the eager schoolboys listening keenly to every word. At last the sun once more sank low enough for them to resume their journey, and off they went again.

'Now I begin to like this scouting of which you talk so much,' said Fakr Bux. 'I think those boys were very nice in their manners and clever with their hands. I saw Hindu boys and Muslim boys working together, and sharing the same duties.'

'Yes,' said Ram. 'Until I became a scout, I had not met many Muslim boys. But we all got to know each other in the troop, and became good friends. Now we know that there is no difference between us. We work for the troop and we work for each other, and we work for other people at all times. When we leave the troop, we will all work together for our country.'

'Splendid!' said Fakr Bux. 'That is the proper spirit. I wish I had had the chance when I was of your age.'

The evening had become cool now, and the sun was low down in the sky. Before them, about two miles off, they could see the buildings of a fair-sized town. It was Bezi, the place where they were to find the railway, and go on by train. Ram felt sorry as they came nearer to town streets, for he had enjoyed the country.

'I am sorry to leave the jungle and the village, Fakr Bux,' he said. 'I cannot tell you why, but I felt more happy there than in the town. If it were not that I want to see mother again, I would like to walk all the way to Patna.'

'You are right, little friend,' said the big fellow. 'There is nothing so peaceful as village and country life. The people there have no tramcars and no cinemas, but they are happy. They breathe pure air, and lead natural lives. Yet it seems that ever so many go away because they are attracted by town life. Faugh! do you feel the town air already?'

They were indeed coming near the big railway station, for the road led close to the railway line. The air was warmer than it had been since they left the jungle, and smelt of smoke and coal dust. Soon they reached the entrance to the station, and enquired about their train. It was due to leave at 10-30 at night.

They walked down the platform. People were hurrying in all directions. There were Muslims in *shirwani* and red cap, Brahmins and Mahrattas, Europeans and Parsis, all preparing to travel.

'What different kinds of people there are here!' said Ram, who was looking at everything with open eyes.

'They are not actually different kinds of people,' said Fakr Bux. 'They are all men and women, and, but for the Europeans, we could say that they are all Indians. They may have some differences in dress, and some different ideas about food. But these are only small things, and not of importance.'

'Where do they all come from?' asked the boy.

'O, from all over India. But we are in the Hyderabad State now, and probably most of the people you see are Hyderabadis. There are Muslims, Hindus and Christians there, all living happily together under one ruler. Let us sit down and rest, Ram.'

They washed the dust of the road from their bodies, and sat down in a quiet corner. A train roared into the station, and the noise and bustle increased. Bells were rung, whistles were blown, smoke and steam puffed upwards, and passengers

shouted for coolies. In a few minutes the train puffed out again, and the scene was as before.

'That was the Calcutta Mail, Ram,' said his friend. 'See, how noisy and excited everyone was. I prefer our walks along the quiet country roads, and I would rather travel slowly in a bullock cart. Then it would be possible to have fresh air and enjoy the scenery.'

'True,' said Ram, 'it would be much nicer. But it would take me rather a long time to walk to Patna or go in a bullock cart. You cannot deny that the train is very useful when one has a long journey.'

'That is true,' said his big friend laughingly. 'I am rather old-fashioned, Ram. There is no doubt that the railway train is a wonderful help to travellers. We must put up with some smoke and noise.'

So they sat and chatted for the rest of the evening, and had some food from the station refreshment-room. Then they bought their tickets, and waited till the 10-30 train steamed into the station. They took their seats in a compartment which was simply full of men. Ram remembered his last train journey, and looked round at all his fellow passengers. There were all kinds of men, slim Maharattas and laughing Telugu people, a

priest with ashes over his face, and a great strong Sikh with his beard. Fakr Bux smiled as he saw the boy's keen observation.

'There are no more dacoits, Ram,' he said with a smile. 'At any rate, I have your money in the belt round my body. No one will get it from me, I assure you. So go to sleep.'

This, Ram managed to do after a time, in spite of the rattling and puffing of the train. In his sleep, his mother seemed to smile on him, and a kindly uncle seemed to be waiting for him at Patna. Ram knew that they were not going there directly, since Fakr Bux wished to stop at Hyderabad, and spend two days on some business. There Ram would also write another letter to his mother.

CHAPTER VIII

HYDERABAD IN THE DECCAN

Next morning, the train was steaming through a country which seemed to Ram very bare and brown. Only here and there were a few fields under cultivation. Great rocks lay over all the place, and it seemed to the boy as if some giant had scattered a handful of stones over the country. Early in the morning the train arrived in Hyderabad main station. They were soon in a *jhutka* and driving towards the home of Fakr Bux's brother-in-law, who lived in Sultan bazaar.

'What splendid streets!' said Ram. They were indeed broad and beautifully built, mostly with concrete roads.

'Yes,' said Fakr Bux, 'people are very go-ahead here. Gradually they are pulling down slums and putting up good houses. This will soon be one of the finest cities in the world.'

Fakr Bux's relative was a tall gentleman called Ibraham Khan, and he welcomed the two very kindly. Ram was given a small room on the roof. He looked around him with interest.

All around were white domes, rising from behind large peepul trees. In the city he could see the four towers of the Charminar rising into the clear air. He felt that he was in a new and wonderful country.

They spent a quiet day, and in the evening their host took them out to see the country around. First they went through the beautiful public gardens, and saw lovely trees and lawns on all sides. The wild animals of the jungle were there, tigers, lions, monkeys, and all kinds of birds. But they were in roomy enclosures instead of the small cages that one usually sees. Everything was well kept and in such good order that Ram was much impressed.

Then they drove out into the country. The horizon was a zig-zag line, so many broken rocks and boulders were piled on every hill-side.

'Do you see that hill just in front of you, Ram ?' asked Fakr Bux. 'I mean that high one with a white building on the top.'

Ram looked, and saw a peaked hill with some kinds of stone buildings. As he looked closer, he could see that a great wall ran all around it. It was a place into which it would be very difficult to enter.

'Yes, I see it,' he said. 'It looks to me like a fort.'

'It is, indeed,' his friend replied, 'for that is Golconda. There is no more famous fort in India, and the name of Golconda is known outside India also. Have you ever read the story of the wonderful valley of diamonds which Sinbad the Sailor found? People say that it was here.'

Ram gazed in silence at the historic spot. The car came nearer, and they reached a great gate in the wall. Mr. Ibraham Khan showed a yellow pass, which he had procured from the military authorities, and they were allowed to enter. Then their path lay upwards, between high gray walls which seemed hundreds of years old. Ruined buildings on all sides; old cannon, and round stones which had been fired from the cannon, all lay around. They seemed to have entered into another world.

Presently they came to an open space, and looked down the wall of rock. A goat could not have climbed up, so steep was the rock. Down below them, a vulture had built its nest.

'It would be impossible for any enemy to come up here,' said Ram. 'I wonder whether it could be done.'

'It was almost done,' said Mr. Ibraham Khan. 'When the Moguls were trying to get into the fort three hundred years ago, they tried at this place. They had been attacking the wall with their cannon for months, but without success. One night they tried to steal in under cover of darkness. Hundreds of men came with long ladders, and placed them against the wall. Silently they commenced to climb up the ladders to the top of the wall. They had almost reached the top, and in another minute would have been inside the fort. At that moment, a stray dog happened to come to the wall. At once it heard the climbers, and started to bark loudly. A sentinel rushed to the wall, to see what had alarmed the dog. There he saw the lines of Mogul soldiers on the ladders, almost at the top of the wall. At once he gave the alarm, and other soldiers came rushing to help him. The ladders were thrown down and broken, and most of the Mogul soldiers were killed at the foot of the wall. That dog had saved Golconda.'

Ram's heart beat more quickly as he thought of the Mogul soldiers, quietly climbing up the ladders in the darkness.

'I wonder what happened to that dog!' he said.

'Oh,' said Mr. Ibraham Khan, 'it was well-treated. King Abul Hasan was so pleased that he had a gold collar made for it, and kept it by him. But he lost his kingdom when the Moguls at last captured Golconda, and he was sent to Daulatabad as a prisoner. Perhaps the dog went with him to keep him company in his imprisonment. Who can tell ?'

Then he went on to tell the boy of the fall of the fort, and how it came about by treachery. Ram listened with beating heart to the great story from the past.

'What heroes those men must have been !' said Ram with a sigh. 'Men do not seem so brave now-a-days.'

'What,' said Fakr Bux, 'have you forgotten the poor villagers only three nights ago, and how they fought in the dark against dacoits with swords and guns ? Men are just as brave now as they were then, Ram, and you will find that out in time.'

They climbed to the very summit of the fort, and looked over the surrounding country. A gentle evening breeze cooled their brows. Hyderabad city could hardly be seen, but a thin covering of smoke rested over the city. After a long look, they slowly made their way down again.

Ram was silent. His mind was full of the beauty of the place, and he thought of the brave deeds of long ago. Suddenly loud cries were heard, and the three of them looked to find what was wrong.

A party of five or six boys had been looking down the steep rock. One daring schoolboy had climbed down to see the vulture's nest. After descending some distance, he lost his courage when he saw how far below the ground was. Now he was trembling on a small shelf of rock, unable either to go on or to return. The other boys had also become excited, and were crying out in terror.

Quickly Ram ran to the place and looked down. He felt a little sick when he saw the danger of the situation, and the cruel rocks more than a hundred feet below. It seemed as if the poor boy must fall down on to those rocks. Ram acted at once, without even stopping to think. Lowering himself over the edge, he climbed down to the place where the boy was. Twice he felt his foot slip, and thought that he must fall. The second time, he heard a cry from Fakr Bux above.

Ram stood on the shelf of rock where the boy was, and saw that the poor fellow was a lad of eight years old, and almost fainting with fear. He passed his arm round the boy, and said :

‘ Now, only be brave, and you will be all right ! ’

But the child was so terrified that he could not understand what was being said. So Ram kept him safe against the wall, and thought things over. The situation was very difficult. Below them there was a fall of a hundred feet on to the rocks. Above his head about fifteen feet of steep rock had to be climbed, in order to get to the top. It had been difficult to come down, but it would be much more difficult to go back again. A good climber might have managed it, but to take this helpless and frightened boy would be impossible.

Fakr Bux quickly saw the position. Neither he nor Ibraham Khan could give any help.

‘ Hold fast, Ram, till I get a rope,’ he cried. ‘ I shall be back very soon, so hold on ! ’

Ram heard, and felt relieved. By this time, the other boy was not able to stand upright, and Ram had to support all his weight. The piece of rock on which they stood was only about nine inches broad. He tried to keep from looking at the terrible fall down to the bottom. Fakr Bux would come.

But by this time pains were shooting through Ram’s arms and legs. He could not move an

inch, and was working hard to keep them both in position. His breath was panting and drops of cold sweat rolled down his face. Ram realised that he could not hold on much longer.

The pain in his arms grew worse. Ram realised that his fingers were almost powerless, and that they had ceased to obey him. Then he knew that he could not hold on much longer. But he determined to try to the last, and not admit failure, even though both fell down together. He wondered whether he would ever see his mother again. Just as the pain in his arms became so bad that he could bear it no longer, a great voice called out :

'Hold on, Ram ! I am here, and we will have you up in a moment.'

Something touched the side of his head, and he saw that it was the end of a strong rope. Fakr Bux had returned, just in time.

With trembling fingers, Ram tried to tie the rope round the body of the boy he had saved. But his fingers would not act, for his muscles were numb. The boy was senseless by now, and could not help him.

Seeing the state of affairs, Fakr Bux tied the rope to an iron ring in the wall. Then quickly he climbed down till he stood beside the two boys.

Ram felt secure when he saw the big form of his friend beside him. Quickly Fakr Bux passed the rope round the body of the strange boy, just under his arms. Then he gave the word, and the people above quickly pulled the boy to safety. The rope was once more lowered, and Ram was drawn up in the same manner. Then Fakr Bux seized the rope in his powerful arms, and walked up the rock as a man walks up a toddy-palm.

As soon as Ram reached safety again, he fainted away. The strain had been too much for him. When he opened his eyes again, Fakr Bux was throwing water in his face.

'That's better!' said the big man, with a sigh of relief. 'You have done splendidly, Ram. But for you, that boy would not be alive now. Do you feel all right?'

'Yes,' said Ram, 'I am quite all right now. Only something in my head kept turning round and round when I got back up here.'

'I am not surprised,' said Fakr Bux, 'and most boys would have fainted long before. But let us go!'

It was now turning dark. As they left Golconda walls, Ram looked back for a last glimpse. He could see the shape of the fort against the even-

ing sky, and a flying-fox flew quietly across the scene.

'Well,' he murmured, 'I shall not forget Golconda for a long time. What a fine place it must have been! India was great then.'

'Yes, little brother, and India will be great again. You will help her to be great, if you always remain honest and brave. Your scout idea is good, for it is only when all men work for one another that they become great.'

They went home, had their evening meal, and soon retired for the night. Next day they were setting off again, and Ram wanted to go straight to Patna. He would have dearly liked to stay longer in the pleasant and hospitable city of Hyderabad. But the thought of his mother made him decide to finish his visit to Patna, and return to her as quickly as possible.

CHAPTER IX

THE LAST LAP

Next morning they caught an early train for Wadi. Again Ram took leave of the new friends he had formed.

'We seem to be meeting new friends, and leaving them at once, Fakr Bux,' he said. 'They are all people that I do not like to leave.'

'True, Ram,' said Fakr Bux, 'and you see that it is a natural thing for all men to have a love for each other. Those village people, Ibraham Khan and his family, you and I, are we not brothers and sisters ? You will find the people in Patna just the same. Do not talk to me of "Communities," Ram, for they are all men and women.'

They changed trains at Manmad, and, for all that day and the next day, travelled north. At Jhansi they had some food, and were able to wash under a water tap. Then back to the train to sleep for some hours, while India seemed to fly past them. At Agra the train stopped for only a few minutes. But Fakr Bux bought a small model of the Taj Mahal made of white stone, and gave it to Ram. He told the boy the story of the

wonderful tomb, which has become world-famous because of its great beauty. Ram's mind was touched by the account of the great love of Shah Jehan.

'It is just what I have been telling you before, Ram,' said his friend. 'Why is the Taj Mahal so pure and lovely? It is because it was produced by love. Love will always produce beautiful things; hatred and quarrels will produce ugly things.'

They passed through Delhi, and for many hours the train puffed on. The next day he saw that the scenery was changing, and there was a pleasant green everywhere. When at last they reached Patna, the journey seemed to Ram to have lasted for weeks.

On the busy platform of the station, Ram again noticed that the people seemed a little different from those in Hyderabad, and different from those in Delhi. They engaged a carriage, and drove to the address of Ram's uncle, Mr. Govind Dass. Soon they found the place where he lived, a pleasant house in a nice street. They asked a servant to show them where Govind Dass was to be found.

'He has gone for a month,' said the man, 'and he is living in his other house at Muzalpur.'

This was indeed a disappointment. But they enquired further, and found that Muzalpur was only seventy miles away, and three hours' journey by train. The servant told them that there was a train to Muzalpur in about twenty minutes.

'Then let us waste no more time, Ram,' said Fakr Bux. 'We shall go there at once.'

They just failed to catch that train, however, and it was late in the evening when they reached Muzalpur. It was a village of about two thousand inhabitants, and some of the Patna people had nice houses there for the hot weather.

They were not able to get a carriage, so they left their belongings at the station and walked through the streets. Ram had been given his uncle's address by the servant at Patna. At last they found the street in which he lived.

'Well, this is the street,' said Ram. 'But what is the matter, Fakr Bux? I feel very cold.'

'The weather is very cold,' said Fakr Bux, 'which is very strange for this time of the year. I cannot understand it.' He shivered as he said this.

It had been growing colder for an hour or two, and many people in Muzalpur were feeling it. At that moment, as they were looking at the houses in the street, Ram and Fakr Bux stopped. Each

looked at the other in surprise. There was a faint trembling in the ground, a slight rumble that seemed to come from everywhere.

Ram immediately thought of the days of his early childhood. There used to be a bridge near his home, where the road ran under the railway. There he used to go with other boys when a train passed over the bridge. As they stood beneath, there was first a trembling of the ground, then a loud roar, as the train passed over. Ram looked to see whether a train was approaching. But there was no sign of the railway anywhere.

The queer trembling stopped, and the street was silent again. 'That was strange,' said Fakr Bux. 'I wonder what was the cause of it!' They moved on in their search for Ram's uncle.

Suddenly the trembling started again. and once more they stopped. A low rumble again came as if out of the earth. The trembling grew stronger and the rumble grew louder. There was no wind, but a palm-tree which grew in the street was plainly shaking to and fro. Ram could hear the rustling of its dry leaves.

Suddenly a mud wall on the opposite side fell down with a thud. A tile fell from a house roof, and broke to pieces near Ram's feet. Others followed. Cries of women and children were heard

from all the houses. The ground was now plainly moving beneath their feet.

'May God protect us all now, little brother!' said Fakr Bux. 'It is an earthquake. I once felt the ground move slightly in Quetta, but this is worse.'

People were rushing out of their houses in terror. Here and there one heard a crash, as a roof or a wall fell. The shaking of the ground grew worse.

'Get out of your houses! Run to the *maidan* till it is over!' shouted Fakr Bux in a great voice that was heard all down the street. The frightened people started to obey his instructions. Ram and Fakr Bux were leaving the place too, when there was a loud crash. It came from a fine large house at the end of the street. The whole roof had fallen in.

'I hope the people got out in time!' said Ram, as they hurried past the ruined house, to look for safety in some open place. At that moment, his ear caught a faint sound.

'Fakr Bux!' he shouted, 'I am sure there is someone buried here.'

As he spoke, he heard the sound again, coming from under the fallen roof. Ram struggled to

clear away the broken tiles. But a great wooden beam held everything down.

'Stand aside a moment,' said Fakr Bux. He bent his back and raised the beam with one great effort. Two ordinary men could never have done it. A room was revealed, partly filled up with the broken roof. A man was lying under some beams, with blood on his face. Carefully they drew him out to safety.

'There are others, Ram!' said Fakr Bux. 'Work quickly!'

It was dangerous work. The ground no longer trembled, for the earthquake shock was over. But pieces of the broken wall continued to fall near them. A great crack in the earth, four or five feet wide, had opened in the street. Twice Ram was almost buried by falling walls. But at last they managed to dig out a woman and two little children.

'That is all,' said the injured man. 'Bless you, for all you have done.'

Ram tore up a sheet that he found, and banded the wounds of all the four. By this time, everyone in the town was astir, and people were being rescued from their fallen homes. Several had been killed, and over two hundred were injured. Two

doctors had arranged a temporary hospital, and were helping the wounded. To that place did Ram and his friend lead the family they had saved.

As they came up, the doctor was bandaging a man's head. He looked up at the man who had been saved by Ram and Fakr Bux.

'Hulloa, Mr. Govind Dass!' he said. 'So you are hurt too! Well, we are lucky to be alive.'

Ram's heart bounded as he heard the name of Govind Dass. Could it be possible?

'My name is Ramadass,' he said, 'and I have come to Patna looking for my uncle, who is called Govind Dass.'

The man gave a cry of joy, and clasped Ram in his arms. 'So you are Ram!' he called out. 'I had a letter from your mother two days ago, telling me that you were on the way to me. I could not understand why you were so long in arriving. And to think that you have saved the lives of all of us!'

No more remains to be said. Ram and Fakr Bux returned to Patna with Govind Dass, and found that his house there had not been damaged. Then both of them worked hard for several days, bringing help and food to the poor villagers who had also

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suffered by the earthquake shock. It was a sad sight to go into the ruined villages, and see the poor people without homes and without food.

'This is a blow to India,' said Fakr Bux to Ram, 'and all Indians must face it. It will need the courage and the help of the whole nation.'

After they had settled down again, Govind Dass sent for Ram's mother. The boy himself went south again, and brought her back with him. With what joy did Ram see her at last settled comfortably in her brother's home !

Ram was sent to a very fine school to finish his education. And Govind Dass said to him :

'You have done so well, Ram, in all your adventures, that I think you will do well in life. Perhaps you will come and join me in my business. Perhaps you will do something great for India. We shall decide when you leave school.'

So Ram is still at school, getting ready for his place in life. The giant Fakr Bux and he write to each other every week. Ram is to go for a holiday with his big friend next summer. What happens to them will perhaps be exciting enough to tell in another story.